

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**May 19, 2013**

**Preparing for Trials**

Read 1 Peter 4:1-11

**Key verse:** “Therefore, since Christ suffered as a human, you should also arm yourselves with his way of thinking. This is because whoever suffers is finished with sin” (1 Peter 4:1).

John Ortberg describes a fictitious manual for Peace Corp volunteers working in South America. The manual offers the following advice on how to handle an attack by an anaconda:

- 1. If you're attacked by an anaconda, do not run; the snake is faster than you are.*
- 2. Lie flat on the ground.*
- 3. Put your arms tight at your sides and your legs tight against one another.*
- 4. The snake will begin to climb over your body.*
- 5. Do not panic.*
- 6. The snake will begin to swallow you from the feet end.*
- 7. Step 6 will take a long time.*
- 8. After a while, slowly and with as little movement as possible, reach down, take your knife, and very gently slide it into the snake's mouth. Then suddenly sever the snake's head.*
- 9. Be sure your knife is sharp.*
- 10. Be sure you have your knife.*

Ortberg concludes his tongue-in-cheek instructions with a serious point: “You never really know what curves life will throw at you, what’s lurking around the corner....But when you are called, and you will be called, you need to know what to do. If you wait until a crisis hits, because it will hit, you have waited too long. You need to be prepared first.”

The New Testament letter of 1 Peter was written to believers facing persecution for their faith. Already, these Christians were facing persecution, and Peter knew that an even worse “fiery trial” was coming. He wanted to *prepare* these believers for that fiery trial. So, Peter gave a clear call to: (1) follow the example of Jesus in facing suffering with obedience and faithfulness, and (2) live holy lives in an immoral and ungodly culture.

Those two emphases come together in an intriguing, even puzzling, way in verses 1 and 2: “Therefore, since Christ suffered as a human, you should also arm yourselves with his way of thinking. This is because whoever suffers is finished with sin. As a result, they don’t live the rest of their human lives in ways determined by human desires but in ways determined by God’s will.”

It is puzzling to read “whoever suffers is finished with sin.” Could the Bible be saying that suffering makes it impossible to sin? *The Message* paraphrase is helpful in unpacking Peter’s meaning here:

“Since Jesus went through everything you’re going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you’ll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.”

Next, Peter lists some of the sinful practices that were once a part of these believers’ lives: “unrestrained immorality and lust,” “drunkenness and excessive feasting and wild parties,” “worship of idols” (v. 3). Then Peter speaks of one of the ways believers were persecuted by non-believers: “They think it’s strange that you don’t join in these activities with the same flood of unrestrained wickedness. So they slander you. They will have to reckon with the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (vv. 4-5).

So far, Peter has addressed two motivations for facing suffering and living a holy life: (1) We can know that trials and suffering have the positive effect of weaning us away from the root of all sinful actions—our desire to please ourselves instead of God. (2) When we are ridiculed for living holy lives, we can know that, ultimately, God will judge everyone for how we live our lives.

Verse 7 offers a third motivation for holy living: “The end of everything has come.” Christ is coming again. So, we ought to prepare for his return by living holy lives. Whether “the end” for us comes through death or should we be part of the generation that sees the Second Coming of Christ, we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So, let us face our trials with obedience and faithfulness, and let us find grace to turn away from wickedness and immorality.

Peter’s final admonition is for believers to *love* and *serve* in the spirit of Christ (verses 8-11). Verse 8 is, to me, especially powerful, and again *The Message* paraphrase says it well: “Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything.”

So, how does this passage (1 Peter 4:1-11) apply to us today?

Certainly, the pressure to live immorally is with us still today. One does not have to return to the first century to feel the pressure of a culture characterized by “unrestrained immorality and lust.”

Suffering persecution for following Christ is also a reality today. Christians in some parts of the world suffer terribly for following Christ. As American culture drifts further away from Judaeo-Christian values, believers here could face ever more severe “fiery trials.”

Let us remember then: *the positive effect of suffering in weaning us from sin, the reality of God’s judgment and of Christ’s coming, and the call to love and serve in the spirit of Christ.*

It’s worth it to follow Jesus!

(Contact Michael at [msigler@fumcfwb.com](mailto:msigler@fumcfwb.com).)